How to Re-Open Your Building After COVID-19

During these trying times, communication is key to a successful transition back into your properties, for both landlords and tenants. Smart Leasing promotes collaborative tenant-landlord relationships, and you can use the pre- and post-leasing process as a chance for engagement and value-creation for your tenants. As health and wellness become a part of the new normal, Smart Leasing can help guide those conversations and provide resources.

This resource below is adapted from an article in the May/June 2020 digital issue of BOMA Magazine, here. More in depth guidance can be found in BOMA’s Coronavirus Guidance Documents, #3 & #4, here.

Planning and prep

- Assemble a team and begin planning as far in advance as possible.
- Consult with federal, state, local and regulatory guidelines and, as needed, legal counsel and risk managers.
- Communicate your re-entry plan with tenants, vendors, and contractors. Ask them to communicate their plans, questions, or concerns to you.
- Expect changes and update your plans as needed, including a possible "re-exit" plan should the virus resurge again.

Social distancing, PPE, and signage

- Building personnel and service providers should follow U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) or similar guidelines to maintain social distancing and observe federal, state and local mandates or recommendations for wearing face masks, coverings or other personal protective equipment (PPE).
- Communicate to tenants regarding any building requirements and recommendations, including staggered work hours or days, smaller or virtual meetings, and restrictions on building guests and visitors.
- Convey new rules and procedures with signage and posters throughout the building on social distancing, handwashing and use of face coverings near elevators, entrances and exits, and amenity spaces.

Common areas, amenities

- Assess the health and hygiene of common gathering areas such as lobby furniture, fitness centers, and conference rooms, and follow state and local guidelines for reopening those areas safely. Once open, provide hand sanitizer, wipe stations and trash containers in lobbies, elevator lobbies, mailrooms, parking facilities, fitness rooms and other common areas, as well as near entrances, restrooms, retail spaces and restaurants.

Elevators: use and occupancy

- Consider strategies to reinforce social distancing in elevator lobbies and elevator cabs, such as limiting elevator occupancy.
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- If possible, open stairwells to ease elevator traffic and wait times and plan for more frequent and more thorough cleaning and disinfecting of elevators, as well as stairwells and handrails, in response to increased stair traffic.

Security and building access

- Limit access points to the building, with one entrance and one exit if possible and create visitor areas at lobby desks with separate paths for "in" and "out."
- To best protect personnel, position security or other personnel at entry points, clearly define their duties and roles, and implement social distancing protocols at security and lobby desks.
- To minimize interaction with the security team, suggest tenants meet and escort visitors or report them in advance using a visitor management system through preregistration and check-in.
- Communicate with tenants to develop delivery protocols to accommodate delivery security preferences.

Building personnel and vendor safety

- Follow CDC guidelines and provide your staff with the equipment and training necessary to perform their jobs safely.
- Consider additional staffing for traffic direction in lobbies and elevators, and to manage any new visitor or delivery procedures.
- Follow CDC and U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) recommendations for flex hours and staggered shifts, and restrict use of shared equipment, supplies and space, including work areas and break rooms.
- Communicate with vendors and contractors on their health and safety plans and establish check-in/check-out procedures, limit access to assigned work areas only, and implement other safety protocols as appropriate.

Janitorial

- Prior to re-entry, consult with your janitorial contractor regarding pre-entry cleaning and sanitizing.
- Establish new cleaning protocols once tenants re-enter the building, including more frequent cleaning of high-touch and high-density areas.
- Follow U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), CDC and other government-approved guidelines and directions for cleaning products, procedures, and protocols, and follow a defined COVID-19 cleaning program if informed of a COVID-positive occupant.

Mechanical systems

- Prior to re-entry, run heating, ventilating, and air-conditioning (HVAC) equipment in building and tenant spaces on a regular schedule and continue normal and regular maintenance, including filter changes.
- If possible, consider increasing exhaust and infusion of outside air, and consult ASHRAE guidelines for operating HVAC systems to reduce COVID-19 transmission; follow CDC guidance where applicable.
- Operate water systems, toilets, and faucets on a regular basis to avoid the accumulation of bacteria, and flush and clean systems if needed prior to re-entry.
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- Consult the International Code Council’s 2018 International Plumbing Code for flushing and disinfecting guidelines or consult with a third party, such as an industrial hygienist, if warranted.

Communication with tenants
- Provide frequent and timely communications with tenants to reduce confusion, help prevent further spread of the infection and provide a safe building environment, and ensure tenants are communicating with you about their plans for re-entry.
- Convey any new policies or procedures the building will be implementing and proper protocol for reporting a positive COVID-19 case.
- Clearly communicate tenants’ responsibilities and obligations within their suites for decisions about social distancing, use of PPE, work hours, illness monitoring or temperature taking and other health and safety procedures for their employees in the workplace.
- Communicate what notification and cleaning procedures will be taken if a positive COVID-19 case is detected.
- Talk with tenants about their responsibility for cleaning and disinfecting procedures in their space that may be outside normal or typical cleaning requirements.

Risk management, insurance, and legal
- Meet with your owner’s risk manager and insurance broker to review policies and coverage and discuss new potential liability risks as a result of COVID-19.
- Review all leases and vendor contracts and identify any areas that need updating, such as tenant insurance requirements and additional cleaning protocols.
- Protect the identity of a COVID-19-positive person and their employer when reporting these incidences to other tenants and building personnel.
- Ensure you understand employment-related laws and regulations before implementing new staffing-related rules, procedures, work requirements, shifts/hours and other requirements.

Additional Resources
- BOMA Coronavirus Guidance Documents – link
- BOMA’s May/June 2020 digital issue of BOMA Magazine, here
- ASHRAE Guidance for Building Operations During the COVID-19 Pandemic – link